

## **The inspiring journey of Ladakhi trailblazer Padma Chorol: From speed skating to historic Asian ice hockey bronze**

All praise for Khelo India's mission to boost ice sports, Padma was among the first members of the national ice hockey team formed in 2016

Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 21: Before becoming a well-known name in Indian women's ice hockey, Padma Chorol's sporting journey began on the speed skating tracks of Ladakh. In a region where opportunities for girls were limited and facilities almost non-existent, Padma became trailblazer in course of her decade-old career on ice. Sport ran in the family. Padma's brothers -- Nawang Stupdan and Tainang Dorge (an Army ice skating player) -- played a decisive role in her journey, which began when she was just 10 years old. Their constant encouragement pushed Padma towards competitive ice hockey at a time when girls were rarely seen on such a surface.

Recalling those early days, Padma told SAI Media, "They always motivated me to come into ice hockey. They persuaded me to train more, to compete, and to believe in myself. They wanted me to make a name for myself in this sport."

Padma Chorol started with speed skating, which helped her develop balance, endurance and control. Every winter, when Ladakh's lakes froze, she gradually moved towards ice hockey. At the time, there were very few girls playing the sport. Due to the absence of women's teams, she trained and competed alongside the boys. "That is when my game truly improved," she says. "Playing with boys made me faster, stronger and mentally tougher. What began as a compulsion, became my greatest strength. It sharpened my physical ability and my understanding of the game."

In 2016, when the Indian women's national ice hockey team was formed, Padma was among its first members. The selection was a moment of pride, but also filled with uncertainty. "We didn't know what international ice hockey really demanded. Just being selected for the national team felt like a huge achievement," says. The early years were extremely challenging. Training was limited to just two to three months a year, completely dependent on natural ice. There were no indoor rinks, no artificial surfaces and very little competitive exposure. Equipment was also scarce—players often had to share skates and sticks that were not the right size. The gap became evident during international competitions. Playing on artificial ice in indoor arenas proved difficult. "The ice was much faster and far more slippery. Even controlling the puck became a challenge," Padma recalls.

Still, the team refused to give up. Gradually, confidence grew. India's breakthrough came in 2019, when the women's team won the bronze medal at the IIHF Women's Challenge Cup of Asia Division I—a moment that validated years of unseen struggle and hard work.

Then came the pandemic. COVID-19 brought competitions and training to a halt, keeping players away from international ice for nearly three years. "It was a very difficult time mentally, but we never lost belief," Padma says. That belief bore fruit in 2025, when India returned to the international stage at the IIHF Women's Asia Cup in the United Arab Emirates. Despite numerous challenges, the team secured a historic bronze medal between May 31 and June 6, 2025 — India's second Asian podium finish.

"That medal was extremely emotional," Padma says. "It made us realise where we started—from frozen lakes and borrowed equipment—and where we had reached."

Today, Padma is a current India international and the assistant captain of the UT Ladakh women's ice hockey team. She is now mentoring young players who have opportunities she never had. According to her, a major reason for this change is the Khelo India Winter Games.

"Khelo India has completely changed the ecosystem," Padma says. "It is nurturing young talent and providing regular competitive platforms. She particularly highlights how the Games have opened doors for players from states where natural ice is not available.

"Earlier, ice hockey was seen as only Ladakh's sport. Now players from other states are gaining exposure, experience and confidence through Khelo India," she adds.

According to Padma, the platform has helped athletes gain recognition, improve their skills and even secure employment opportunities. “For many young players, this is the first time they are truly being noticed,” she says. Padma is happy that the landscape around the sport is changing. Ladakh now has an artificial ice rink. Dehradun and Pune have followed. Structured leagues backed by Khelo India and other initiatives are giving players regular competition and visibility.

For the first time, Indian women’s ice hockey has a pathway and that’s why they are among for high. “Indian women’s ice hockey currently competes in the fourth division internationally. With domestic leagues finally in place, the goal is clear. We are looking at the qualification for the World Championships in 2027. And I believe it is achievable.” Padma signs off.



